

## No More Secrets by EvieSmallwood

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**Characters:** Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler

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**Summary:**

Nancy misses Barb, Mike misses Eleven, and two siblings can't go very long without talking about what's hurting them.

## No More Secrets

*The Clash* was playing. She had no idea why she was listening to them, but Jonathan had made her a mix tape. 'For Christmas,' he'd said, when he'd handed her the cassette on New Year's Eve. They'd gone to the Byers', her and Mike - to get away from home, at their mom's insistence.

That had been an odd conversation. Nancy's mom had seemed torn at the prospect, but she had reiterated over and over that Mike 'needed to get out of the house,' and 'be around friends.'

Nancy hadn't wanted to go out. For the first time in a while, all she'd wanted was to be alone. To curl up on her bed and drown herself out with classic pop hits her father despised. She wanted to cry.

But she didn't; she put on a nice dress, curled her hair, and drove. The ball had dropped, Mike and Will had played games on the latter's new Atari, and she and Jonathan had sat in the kitchen, taking quietly of what they should do about the boys.

Truly, Nancy was at a loss when it came to Mike. Probably that was because she was at a loss with herself, too. Everything hurt. Life felt like broken glass, and all she wanted to do when the sun shone through was shut the curtains.

Did Mike feel that way, too? Was that why he spent long hours in the basement, pacing back and forth across the floorboards, or crying at night with silent sobs? Like her. When she thought of Barb (who was smart, and funny, and loyal, and cared, and had probably died worrying that Nancy wouldn't be her friend anymore, given Steve).

That was so stupid. It was absolute bullshit, and made Nancy so mad, all she felt like doing was pulling her hair out. Barb had died, and Nancy hadn't been able to save her, and it sucked. It was horrible, and frustrating.

Nancy tapped her pencil on the textbook which lay open before her. A tear fell onto the page. She stared down at it, watching the liquid seep into the paper. She sat up suddenly and wiped her eyes with the

sound of rapping on the door. It was too urgent to be her father, and her mother wouldn't have knocked anyway.

Nancy drew in a sharp breath and yanked it open. Mike, of course, stood in the hall, back turned.

"Mike?"

He turned to her, looking absolutely miserable. Nancy took in the bags under his eyes and the more-than-usual tossed hair. She leaned against the doorway. "We don't have to, today. If you don't want."

They'd been talking, every Tuesday night. About stupid things. About D&D campaigns, about homework, about tv shows and music. But this conversation was one they'd both been delaying, one that needed to be out in the air.

"I... it's fine."

As she stepped aside, Mike ducked in. She closed and locked the door behind them. Mike waiting for her to sit first. The bed dipped and creaked under their weight, as always. Nancy gathered her index cards, and Mike didn't bother to apologise for interrupting her, this time. "H-how was job hunting?"

Nancy swallowed. "Alright. I applied at that diner on Maple."

Mike nodded. "That's cool. Think you'll get it?"

"I don't know," Nancy set the homework aside and turned to face him fully. Mike ducked his head and stared down at his curled fists. "Do you want to talk first, Mike?"

He was silent for a whole minute. Then, "I miss her."

"El?"

"Yeah. A lot. Every day. And I can't talk about it with the guys, because they don't... they don't miss her like I do, and they didn't know her like I did -- not that I knew her much anyway, it's just that Dustin and Lucas spent most of the time calling her 'freak', and 'weirdo', and Lucas only accepted her the day she--" Mike broke off all

too quickly, closing his eyes as he worked through the sadness.

"Mike? Mike, what was she like?"

Mike frowned. "What do you mean? You knew her."

Nancy rolled her eyes. "Not well."

"Right. Well, she didn't talk much, but when she did, it was like..." he trailed off, cheeks slightly pink out of frustration.

"Like what?"

"I don't know. It's stupid."

Nancy took his hand, and Mike jumped at the unexpected contact. His skin was cold. Nancy felt suddenly overwhelmed with... with everything... it was so hard to speak like this; on the verge of tears. "Just tell me?"

"It was like every word mattered," Mike burst out, and then looked furtively around him to be sure no one else was listening. He nervously went on. "She was lonely. Like, really lonely. She didn't even know what a friend was, or a promise... I thought that she could stay with us, that you could be like her sister, because I don't think she had a family or anything--"

Nancy closed her eyes, absorbing all of this new information on the girl she'd never met. "That was nice of you," she choked out.

Mike leaned forward, concerned. "Nance? Are you okay?"

"No, yeah, I just..." she hastily dried her eyes, giving herself space. "I miss Barb. I really, really miss her. And it feels like no one else does -- like they don't even care, and that's so ridiculous, because you can't just forget someone so good."

Mike nodded solemnly. "I get it." And he did. Maybe he was the only one. "Nancy?"

"Yeah?"

Mike brushed away a tear. "I'm sorry for all of this. For not talking to you, and being so annoying, and... and forgetting what it was like to know you--"

Nancy cut him off abruptly by pulling him into a hug. She found herself sobbing into his shoulder, hands clinging to his shirt. "That wasn't you," she said sharply, voice shaking. "That wasn't your fault, okay? I should have been better. I should've been there. And you're *not* annoying."

Mike swept a hand under his eye. Nancy pulled back and rested against the headboard, and then patted the spot next to her. Her brother looked reluctant at first, but then sat next to her. He leaned his head on her shoulder, and they stared at the now bare corkboard mounted on the wall across from her bed.

"I was proud of you," Nancy said. "That day, when the monster came for us. I was proud of you."

"Me too," said Mike. "I mean, of you, not of me."

Nancy bit her lip to keep from laughing. "Thanks." They sat there for a while, listening to the music, to each other's breathing. Soon, Mike fell asleep beside her. Nancy followed soon after, feeling empty and exhausted. But at least, not alone.

#### **Author's Note:**

So! It's been a while since I've written anything, soz if it seems out of touch. But I'll get back into my groove soon enough. Anyway, this is #1 in a series set between seasons 1 and 2, which will consist of little one-shots about the characters and how they cope. I might even do a little "parents react" bit, because you don't see much of those. You can request, though. Take two seconds to comment what you thought, and what you want to see next.

Toodle pip!